

**University of Virginia Football Media
Conference
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Head Coach Tony Elliott
Press Conference**

Q. You guys are adding three receivers. Was that a need for you guys at that position? What do you like about the three wide receivers?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, I think in college football nowadays, wide receivers that can go make plays are a need for everybody.

Isaiah (Robinson) was the first one that committed, came to camp. You saw what you saw, his length and athleticism, catch radius. Really had an impressive showing at our camp during the summer.

Then Dillon (Newton-Short) was a guy we had our eye on and wanted to challenge him to kind of put himself in position for us to be able to give him an opportunity. Super proud of him because we probably challenged him more from an academic standpoint than anybody in the class. Man, he accepted the challenge.

If you just go look at the monster season he had this year, he has deceptive speed for his size. What I really like about him is his ability to go attack the football. He's an extreme competitor, which I think is going to bring some toughness to the room.

Josiah (Abdullah) is an electric guy that can do a lot of things.

What I like is kind of a mixture. You got a little bit of everything in all three. I think as you build your offense and that receiver room, you want to have versatility. Every plan is going to require different skill sets. I feel like we added three really quality young men that are coming from good football backgrounds, highly competitive programs. They know what it takes to win. I think they're also good personality fits for who we are here.

Q. You've added a pair of quarterbacks. Does the plan change? Were you always anticipating going after a veteran guy?

TONY ELLIOTT: So first the two guys that are coming to join us.

Cole (Geer), very, very good athlete. Unfortunately had the hand injury this season, so was cut short. But man, the guy is out there trying to play receiver, trying to do everything for his football team with a broken hand. The athleticism, the competitor, that's what we fell in love with in the beginning. Excited about him.

Bjorn (Jurgensen) was a guy we got on a little bit later in the recruiting process because we knew we were going to take two in the class, being the situation at that time. He had a monster season down in Florida. We had to work hard to keep some of the bigger guys off of him, so to speak.

But super excited about them. They're a little bit different, but they complement each other well. Excited for those guys to get here in the summer and compete.

Unfortunate situation with AC (Anthony Colandrea). The intention with the decision I made was never to get him to entertain or think about the portal. I was planning on him coming back and being the guy for us going forward.

Man, things change. Now we will have to go and look and find a veteran guy in the portal. We're going to be aggressive from that standpoint because I think we got a lot to sell. I wish AC well. He's leaving here on good terms. There's no bad blood from my perspective.

It's just unfortunate that the intent was not for AC to leave the program. I was excited about getting back to work this off-season and helping to get him to a place of getting his confidence back at the highest level. Also I knew that I have

a responsibility this off-season to go put some more pieces in place around him.

Unfortunately we'll be doing that with another veteran quarterback through the portal process.

Q. Did you need to consider two? What was the plan?

TONY ELLIOTT: So we still got Gavin (Frakes). We brought Gavin in. Obviously Gavin has kind of been in the wings waiting because we had Tony. We had Tony and AC. We're looking at several different options.

The biggest thing is trying to find two guys that want to come in and battle. May be difficult. Still trying to figure out who's all going to be available. I think it's going to be determined by who's available and kind of what the parameters are around for securing those guys.

We're definitely going to be aggressive not just at quarterback but in other positions of need this cycle in the portal.

Q. A lot of in-state kids. What does it say about the movement and the progress you have made?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, I think it's progress. Man, I want to get guys from 804, I want to go to 757, northern Virginia. I want all of the best players to stay in the state of Virginia.

We understand the work we got to do. We got to make them want to stay. I think this is a good step in the right direction. I feel like we hit on the right players. Again, as many as you want to stay, it's still got to be about fit, make sure it's a fit.

We went after more. There were several other guys that we battled. Obviously we lost a couple of in-state battles to some high-profile guys. We also lost some out-of-state battles as well.

We're going to try to keep the best players in the state of Virginia. I'm excited about the direction we're heading this off-season.

Hopefully we can make a compelling argument. We got the academics. I know what we got to do as a program from a football standpoint, a new facility. I think going forward we will have an even stronger component of things to be able to sell to keep these guys home.

Q. You added one more today, but 18 total. Is this the size class you were hoping for? Looking at the amount of seniors leaving, how much room does that leave for transfer portal?

TONY ELLIOTT: Right now we're in the process of having exit meetings with all of our players on the roster. You never know, right? There's guys that when I came in the door, I was intentional to make sure we did the right thing by them. Now they've gotten to a point of graduation. I'm sure there are going to be some guys that I'm wanting to bring back that feel like they want another opportunity.

In terms of the size of the portal class, that will be determined over the next really few days as we finish up these meetings as the portal gets ready to open on the 9th.

I still want to be as much developmental as possible. I think this year is going to be a little bit different just because of the timing, right? This is the end of year three. Several of guys that were already here on the roster will now be graduates of the University of Virginia, which I think is the right thing, was the right thing to do, is the right thing to continue to do. Guys that were committed here earlier, make sure that we can fulfill our obligation by getting them to graduation. That's going to open up some more spots.

Each year is going to be different. I do want to be a developmental program. However, man, the landscape is changing so fast. It's hard to be developmental if you lose your developmental

guys, right? If I have developmental guys that are leaving, it's hard to get the exact replacement with the exact same situation based off timing? If I lose guys now, it's hard to replace that by February with a high school kid. You got to supplement with your roster. We will have a few more portal guys than normal. A lot of that is just because now this is the natural time of attrition for some of the guys that were here when we took over.

Q. You mentioned 757. What can you tell me about the defensive back (CJ Spence), generally about that region, the strength of it this year.

TONY ELLIOTT: (CJ) Spence, one of our first defensive commits. Man, he's long. He's got a lot of length, very athletic. Had to play some quarterback this year out of team necessity. He has a ton of upside as a corner. He could easily continue to grow and be a hybrid guy that can play a little bit of safety and some corner. Tremendous athlete. A ton of length. Coming from a highly competitive area down there. Brings a little bit of swagger with him, as well, which kind of the 757 is known for, just that brand of football they play down there. Really excited about him.

757, there's a ton of players. We went after one of the top offensive linemen in the country. Kind of made the final three, then weren't able to finish there. A couple receivers. There's just a ton of talent down there.

What I got to do in this program is we got to make it where they believe they can be successful by coming to UVA. There's been examples in the past. We have to deliver, like Anthony Britton, has to be successful here. When he's successful, I think that helps us to break down any kind of misconceptions about opportunities here.

But there's a ton of players down there. Hopefully this next cycle we'll be able to not only tap into 804 but entice some guys from 757 to come this way.

Q. A lot of Maryland, Clemson, fishing out of the area. How does that change the recruiting battle?

TONY ELLIOTT: It's changing. It's like year to year, right? The first time I sat up here, we got to keep North Carolina out of here, Penn State out of Virginia. Now South Carolina, Clemson, Maryland.

One, it's just a testament to the quality of the football in the state and the caliber of the talent. Really it's changing because the dynamics of college football, right? So now territories are not as significant as they once were because there's just different ways of recruiting, right? Now we're going to have to battle off everybody.

Yes, I talked about it with. We would love to put a fence around our state and let us battle for the top guys and keep everybody out. That's going to be impossible.

Each prospect and each year is going to just bring different opportunities. But the good thing is there's confirmation that we got the right type of talent in the state. As I told the staff, and I went through it my early years at Clemson, you're going to get your nose bloody, but you got to fight the fights. You got to fight your fights. Even if you know you're going to get your nose bloody, that's the only way we're going to get better. It's been fun to watch the staff, too, get into some of those battles and fight and scrap for the guys in our state.

We're talking about Clemson, South Carolina this year. Man, who knows. It could be Texas, USC next year. Heck, USC came in and got one of the top running backs in the state. Would have loved to have kept him home. Then with the Internet and technology, like, the kids now, their allegiances aren't quite what they used to be. That's where we have to make progress.

One thing I do fear a little bit about kind of the direction that it's heading is just the evolvement of the high school head coach, right? In our sport it's still there. With each cycle that goes by, it's going to be a lot more external folks involved in the process. I think when that's the case, you're going to see more different brands from all over the country coming into the state.

Q. Eight guys early enrollment?

TONY ELLIOTT: Six. We were hoping to hit on a couple today. Right now we got six.

Q. How much are you happy to get those guys? Any of those guys you feel like can make an early mark for you?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so super excited to get those guys. Wish we had a few more because of the importance of spring ball, right, and certain positions.

It's going to be huge for Jim (Harris Jr.) on the offensive line to have a chance to get in here midyear. With Tyler (Neville) leaving, it's going to be big for Justin (Zames) to come in at tight end. We have some guys like Karson (Gay) still coming back from surgery. He's going to get a ton of reps, which is going to be huge to help build the depth.

Sichan (John), to get him in here and get him rolling. 'Cause typically the hardest transition to this level is in the trenches, offensive line, defensive line. When you got an offensive lineman and a defensive lineman coming in midyear, that's going to be huge.

Corey Costner is going to help us on the back end. Excited about them. Then we got the two receivers that are coming in in Josiah and Dillon will be here midyear. To get those guys rolling, it's going to help them immensely.

In essence, when you come in midyear, you're getting 15 practices, all of the off-season, the strength and conditioning. It's almost like you've

had an additional year before you even get to fall camp. Super excited and happy for them. Each year it's a different perspective. Some schools, they don't allow for midyears. I think you're probably going to see that trend a little bit more from the high school ranks with the portal, right? You're going to see more of the high school guys trying to secure spots on rosters by getting there early.

I think the receivers got a chance to up the level of competition. Big for (Justin) Zames just to get the experience. Jim to get his feet wet. With Sichan (John) and Corey (Costner), those are probably the two that I think with the amount of need at their spot, it's going to be huge for us.

Q. How has working with the collective changed since Virginia changed some of the laws?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, I mean, prior to the change, it was a great working relationship with Lo (Davis) and all his folks at Cav Futures. Now it makes it easier to feel like, Okay, man, we can have these conversations. We're not breaking any rules. They're able to have more information to make their decisions, right? There's a specific aspect of the conversation that is determined by them, that's not determined by me, right?

To know that you got a close working relationship, that everything is aboveboard, we're doing it the right way. We're not at a disadvantage from anybody else because of the way the law is set up.

Just in general, like, with the way it is, that's a part of the conversation. They want to talk to me. They want to talk to the position coach. They also want to talk to the collective. That's just where we are in college football.

It's huge to be able to have them readily accessible, informed, and ready to have those conversations to help secure prospects for us.

Q. With how fast the portal can move, is that crucial the next couple weeks?

TONY ELLIOTT: It's critical. For many years you had your process when you brought a prospect into campus on an official visit, you showed them academics, strength and conditioning, nutrition, football. You did all of that. Now you got to have the collective piece, as well, ready to go.

Having them available and accessible in real-time is critical because depending upon where a young man is in his football career, it's going to determine the type of conversations. So undergrad guys' conversations are going to be a little bit different than a grad transfer that has one year. A grad transfer that has one year, he's not looking for the wine and dine. He wants to know what really matters. Do I have an opportunity to compete? Can you develop me for this one year? From a business standpoint, does it make sense? That's where the collective comes into play.

You're dealing with all those different types of young men. You have to have all of those things ready, available at a moment's notice, right? The way the rule is, I know there's a lot of guys making their intentions known, but not all those guys are in the portal yet. There's no communication that should be taking place, right?

We're going to do it right. We're prepared and ready, getting all of our information and all of our background work done so that when the button is hit, we're ready to go.

I can't say that's the case everywhere. I know how we're going to do it. But we got to be ready.

Q. Can you talk about the three offensive linemen. Were you happy with the number or...

TONY ELLIOTT: This is where it gets really tricky from a roster management standpoint. I know we got the settlement looming, changes to roster limits and scholarship numbers. Right now I got 85, right? You can only replace what you lose. You can only replace, depending upon when they leave, right?

For example, Brian Stevens is leaving. He's done. Eligibility is done. He's done with school. He's leaving in January. I can replace his spot, right?

Ty Furnish is leaving, but he doesn't graduate till May. I can't replace his spot until the summer. You're trying to play the numbers game, then you're also trying to plan for any attrition, older veteran guys that you can attract in the portal. The number for us was three. We felt that was the sweet spot from a high school standpoint.

Anything else after that we would address when the portal opens. I feel, man, like we really hit it on the head when we talk about these guys. Jon Adair, man, he's got the prototypical body. He looks exactly how you want him to look as a tackle. He's also pretty developed as a high school guy. Still got room to grow, so he's not maxed out body type-wise. Upside from an ability standpoint and perfect fit. Man, perfect fit for the University of Virginia in an offensive lineman. We're super excited about Jon. Grayson (Reid), we've been looking for an athletic center for the future. If you go watch this guy, man, he's probably one of the best athletes in his group, regardless of position. This guy plays wideout, he kicks, he throws, he does everything. He's a super, super, super dynamic athlete.

One of the things I think helped us early on is kind of he was on that fringe from a height standpoint. But he's grown a little bit. He's stretched out. I think he's going to be awesome as an athletic center in the future.

Big Jim Harris is a guy that can play tackle or guard. He gives us some flexibility there. He'll be

here this summer. Big jumbo athlete with some really good growth potential.

I feel like from a high school standpoint, if you're looking at developmental guys, that we hit on the right type of developmental guys to get in our program and start building for the future. As we finish up these meetings, any more attrition that we have will be addressed in the portal.

The problem is these guys are going to be really good players. I can project and say maybe they'll be ready to play as freshmen. I hope they are. They're developmental guys, right? We're going to need some experience. That's why we sat on the number of three, then said anything else we do will be more veteran guys in the portal.

Q. Can you address how you guys are greeted now in high schools compared to when you first got here?

TONY ELLIOTT: I believe so. I believe it's improving. I think a lot of it is the consistency of just showing up, right, just showing up and being present whether there's a player there or not. That was something I said from day one. I want the coaches to visit every school in the state at least once during the calendar year, whether there's a prospect there or not, to start building those relationships.

As they watch from afar, if they don't have a player here, they cannot only hear the message but they see it transpiring in our guys. Anybody that has a player that's on our roster that's in-state, when they go home, they can get confirmation that Coach Elliott and their staff are doing what they said they're going to do.

They're developing these guys athletically, they're supporting them academically, but they're also investing in these young men holistically beyond these two areas to have them have the best experience possible while here at UVA.

I think the relationships are improving. We got to continue to work every single day. I think the biggest thing is when we bring a young man in, I know we're talking in-state, but really every high school or transfer guy that comes in, they feel like they were treated fair, they were treated well, and they have a good experience. When you go out, there isn't a, Oh, UVA is coming in. Now they know you by name. When you go into a school, they know you by name, obviously the relationship has a chance to grow and develop.

Q. When you bring in two quarterbacks in the same class, what's the challenge in that?

TONY ELLIOTT: You just got to be honest, give 'em a fair opportunity to compete, let 'em go compete.

I think we had a great example in Tony Muskett, what it really should be all about. As big of a competitor that he is, man, even though he only started one game for us this year, he had a tremendous impact on our roster.

I met with him this morning. I told him that. I said, I don't think you can understand and comprehend what you did for this program in the way you conducted yourself.

So both of these guys knew we were going to bring in two quarterbacks. In the old days, you wanted to keep five on the roster, right? Times have changed a little bit. I think you still got to protect your roster. Both of these guys are going to have a legitimate opportunity to compete. Wherever the chips fall, they fall. Hopefully, man, they'll just continue to battle all the way till the end. You don't know until then.

I know one thing, these are two really good young men that are passionate about joining our program. I'm excited to get them here this summer. Let's start the developmental process to get them in position to both be able to go compete at a high level. Evaluate it fairly.

Hopefully, like, even with AC and Tony over the last two years, they see I'm going to be fair.

Man, I'm not going to try and play favorites or games. I'm going to try to make the best decision for the program and be fair and honest with these guys. I think that's really all you can ask.

Q. Do you have an idea positionally what you're going to look at in the transfer portal?

TONY ELLIOTT: We're going to look at pretty much every position, right? I think there's a potential need and opportunity at all positions. Some more so than others. But we're going to evaluate every position and be ready and prepared for a run at some of the best in the country.

I think we've laid a foundation for the last couple years. I think we got a great nucleus of guys that will be returning in '25. We got our nose bloodied a little bit. Let's fight some more battles and see can we supplement.

We'll be looking at every position. We may not end up signing one at every position. I have the staff, the coaches and the scouting folks, looking for every position on the roster to see, one, what's out there, to know what's out there.

Again, the opportunity may present itself five days after the portal opens, right? I may go through all of these meetings. I think back to one in particular. I went through a meeting, we had a plan together. Everything was good. Man, we're going to go battle. Boom, a week later I get notification via compliance that the young man jumped in the portal, right?

We got to be ready and prepared. We got to plan for a plan, I guess you'd say. We got to have a plan for a plan. I don't know what the right way to describe it is, but we just got to be ready. It's just the nature of the business right now.

Q. On the quarterbacks, similar skill sets? Do you want two different guys to develop in different directions? What's the strategy?

TONY ELLIOTT: I think they're a little bit different in their skill sets, which complements each other very well. Also I think what that does is it allows them to push each other and make each other better, right? They can force each other to improve in areas where the other one may have a little bit more of a strong suit. I think they're a little bit different.

In terms of skill set, one thing is you got to be able to play as a quarterback, you got to be able to think as a quarterback, manage the game as a quarterback, be able to make all of the throws. From an athleticism standpoint, that's a bonus. You have to have the minimal ability to get yourself out of trouble. You can't be completely stationary in the pocket.

For me the biggest thing is the ability to play quarterback. Can you lead? Can you manage the system? Can you make all the throws? The 'it' factor, the 'wow' factor, will be determined by your athleticism.

Q. Signing day week is also a time we see changes in coaching staff. Do you anticipate any changes on your staff?

TONY ELLIOTT: I don't anticipate any right now. Again, I've been very, very critical of myself first and foremost. It starts with me. Then just evaluating from the standpoint of relationships to ability to put the players in the right positions. Do you consistently put them in an advantageous numbers situation or angle situation for them to be successful?

Again, somebody could walk in and say, Coach, I got this opportunity that I want to look at. Again, I'm all about that. I'm all about trying to develop a staff. Only thing I ask is make sure it's a better situation, not just a lateral move.

I don't anticipate. I haven't heard anything from any of my coaches. I'm going to continue to evaluate. Again, we're about a few days post-season. Right now I don't anticipate any changes.

Q. With the changing landscape, it's hard to figure out a right routine coming into each year. Every single year you've been here there's been a change to the calendar, how you approach it. How you recruit to Virginia, how have you adopted your mentality with recruiting to Virginia?

TONY ELLIOTT: That's going to be a core standard inside-out. That's where we're going to start. I want to make sure from the high school standpoint, man, we visit every school, we identify early who the top players are, start establishing a relationship as quickly as possible.

Even with the landscape changing, the philosophy of being inside-out doesn't change. We're going to start with Virginia. We consider the DMV area in-state, that with all of the state of Virginia, that's where we start.

Being very open-minded in terms of guys that have left the state, especially guys that left the state prior to me taking over, being open to giving those guys some priority when it comes to transferring back in.

Everything else we'll kind of adjust from there. But I want to stay inside-out. That's just the core philosophy of mine that I believe is the right way to do it. That's how we're going to do it.

Q. (Question about the ability to talk to kids being a benefit.)

TONY ELLIOTT: One, man, it takes a lot of pressure off of me as a head coach when I go into a school. Obviously you're probably the most recognizable face when you walk into a school. You may have just a kid that's not even an athlete that is a fan that wants to come up and say hello, take a picture. In the past you're like, I can't have any interaction with a high school-level kid much less a student-athlete that we're recruiting.

It takes a lot of pressure off that. You feel like you're not a criminal. Legitimately, it's legal for me to talk.

Also, too, it gives you an opportunity to get a better feel for a young man. You can have a quick, five-minute conversation. Usually in that conversation you can kind of get a good indication like this is a young man that I think is a fit, he's looking for what we have to offer. You can say this is probably not. It helps us to be able to weed through some of that.

Actually it was very beneficial last cycle because for the guys that did not take official visits in the summer to your school, you know what I'm saying, you may have been able to talk January before to know who they were or you didn't get them on your campus. There are going to be some schools that are essentially signing kids blind unless you had them during the season. In-season visits are very, very difficult.

It just gives us an opportunity to get a good head start on building a relationship because again I think the high school cycle unfortunately is going to speed up. You're going to have to in January have a good, good idea of what your list is going to look like.

It's just awesome to be able to have a conversation for five minutes with a young man, to be able to get a feel, as opposed to the old rule where you could have absolutely no interaction with the young man when you went to the school in January.

I think now they're also going to add for potentially coaches to do home visits. It's awesome, but also, like, it puts a big strain on the workweek and the quality of life of a coach, right? 'Cause now you're trying to hit every school, see every prospect, and you're doing home visits till 10, 11 at night. Then you're traveling to your next destination to get in place to be at school at 7 in the morning.

The head coach can't do a home visit, so the only time I can talk to them is in the school. It's going to put a strain on the assistant coaches and the logistics around making all of that happen.

Now that you can do those things, you want to make sure you get in front of the right guys, which also puts a strain on relationships because how can you consistently get in the schools that may not have a player. I mean, there's a lot of dynamics that I think people on the outside don't quite understand, just how much coordination, communication, planning takes place for you to get a good head start on a class in January.

Q. Back-to-back years you've gone up to Deerfield Academy. What is the benefit going back to a school to get kids from within the same program?

TONY ELLIOTT: First and foremost, it's awesome that the program has the caliber of players that we desire. I think the relationship and then obviously when you're recruiting a young man, you can go in there in January and talk to the younger guys, you're able to establish that relationship earlier.

The young man that's in your program can give confirmation to his former teammates.

Obviously that's a school that naturally is just a seamless transition to the environment here at UVA. It helps a lot when, one, the school has those caliber of players spread out through multiple classes. When you get one of them, he's having a good experience, that's your biggest recruiting tool.

I know the coaches get a lot of credit. I'm talking about these guys on this list. You're asking questions about them. The real recruiters are the guys in the locker room, right? That's your best recruiters. The way that they recruit the best for you is them having a good, positive experience.

Q. Two linebackers in this class. What stood out about them?

TONY ELLIOTT: We'll start with Justin (Rowe). First, he's got a very unique story being from Canada, boarding down in Asheville. I remember the first time I went in the school and had a chance to see him. Just his frame, was watching him work out, very explosive. I think he was 36-inch plus vertical with his workouts. Played multiple positions. You saw him with the ball in his hand. You saw him making tackles on defense.

Team was very successful this year. Then had to persevere through the adversity. I remember talking to him as he's getting ready to leave Asheville to go back to Canada for a couple weeks not knowing if his season was going to resume.

Just super, super happy he was able to do that. Also it's a testament to the character of not just him but that program to be able to come back and put it all together and go win at a very, very high level.

4.0 student. Really, he wanted to be at UVA. Originally it was an interesting story. We were taking two linebackers. We were down to our top three on the board. One had called and committed the week before. We were down to one spot. I remember one was on a visit getting ready to commit, then Justin is calling at the same time like, Hey, I want to come.

Essentially it was, like, Hey, we got to talk about it as a staff because we have to protect the numbers. We said two, now we have three wanting to jump in the boat. After talking to the staff, they were like, No, find a way.

We'll take you as an over-sign, next-best-available player. One young man decommitted from us and went elsewhere. We stuck with the two. He wanted to be at UVA. He was at the top of our list of the prospects above the black line we wanted. It was awesome to get him.

Mr. (Isaiah) Reese, I went up there and saw him for the first time. One, I fell in love with his tape. You watch him on tape, he does everything for his team. He's playing running back, linebacker, he's returning kicks, doing a little bit of everything.

When I had a chance to go up there, this was the benefit of being able to sit down with a young man, I was able to sit down with him and his mom, get a good understanding of his background. He's another young man that's boarding away from home. A lot of maturity. But he also loves ball. He's being challenged academically at the school that he's at. Immediately fell in love with them. Those were the guys.

It's always a challenge when you put the top three guys on your list, you actually have a chance to get all of the top guys. Him and Justin were up there along with another young man. I'm excited about the athleticism that they're bringing. They both got good growth potential, good explosiveness. I think it helps us from an athletic standpoint to be able to go sideline to sideline. In this league, in college football nowadays, people want to run the ball, but they want to throw it, too. Everything is going sideways.

I'm excited about those two linebackers.